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DATE: February 21, 1975

To : File

FROM : Joshua Lederberg

SUBJECT:

I have had a number of inquiries motivated by my having signed the statement on energy policy which was circulated by Professor Hans Bethe recently. I am dismayed that there has been so much reaction to a single sentence in that statement, referring to the urgency of expanding our energy-producing capability without it having been read in the context of the entire writing. I am therefore attaching a copy of the full statement and hope that it will be read with equal emphasis on all of its parts.

I am also attaching a post-script that did not appear in the public press and which partly amplifies some of my own additional views on the subject.

A point that none of the signatories would have wished to see overlooked is that energy production and consumption by any means whatsoever entails an inevitable environmental cost. On the other hand, as we have seen in recent months, sudden variations in the cost of and utilization of energy can have the most serious consequences for economic stability and we must plan for policies that can carry us through transitions with the least wreckage. On the one hand there is no way that we can consume energy and not pay for it; on the other hand, we can hardly afford to undertake abrupt changes in our energy-consuming economy! Indeed, it will take a notable effort merely to stabilize our per capita consumption of energy without inviting serious economic consequences.

To rely upon an ever increasing quota of imported oil to satisfy the energy deficit, is of course to expose ourselves to ever deeper political coercion of a kind of which we have seen only the mildest foretaste, the long-range outcome of which could be frightful beyond any of the other risks in question.

I would have hoped that as many readers would have reacted to the plea for planned conservation as have responded to the remarks about nuclear power. With respect to these, opinions of course differ widely. My own position is that the safety problems of nuclear power plants have been by no means solved to the point of complacency, and there are many, many revisions of policies that have been promulgated in the past when the promotion of nuclear power in this country was a monopoly managed by a joint committee of the Congress. My own conviction is, however, that these problems are soluble, that continued development of nuclear power should be permitted and perhaps even encouraged although under the closest and most critical scrutiny of its designs so as to reach ever increasing perfection with regard to safety in parallel with the increasing number of plants that are to be designed and constructed. The safety engineering of nuclear reactors is a difficult and intricate problem on which I can hardly claim ultimate

expertise, and on which we see new criticisms and new insights every day. Exaggerated and faulty criticisms have perhaps done a disservice by beclouding the real measure of the problems that need to be faced - in the long run on matters as complex as this, we will have to rely upon our judgements of the competence and the integrity of the people who devote themselves most intently to the actual technical issues, and upon the management structure in which they have the opportunity to exchange information and criticism and to respond to public concern. Especially with respect to the latter, the previous management organization of atomic energy has been highly faulty, and I certainly have no brief for measures like the federally imposed guarantee of insurance which frustrates an objectively motivated third party examination of the costs and risks.

There have, however, been many constructive changes in the organization of the federal energy program in recent months and I believe that they should be given an opportunity to demonstrate to the American people that they are now up to the task.